

[Selections from:]

History of the Problem of Universals in the Middle Ages: Notes and Texts

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William of Ockham, *Quodlibet* 4, Question 35, and *Quodlibet* 5, Questions 12–13 [Against Ficta]

Translated from the Latin text in William of Ockham, *Quodlibeta septem*, Joseph C. Wey, ed., (“Opera theologica,” vol. 9); St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1980.

***Quodlibet* 4, Question 35:**

Whether first and second intentions are really distinguished

No. For beings of reason are not really distinguished. But both first and second intentions are only beings of reason. Therefore, etc.

To the contrary: First and second intentions are things. And they are not the same thing. Therefore, they are distinct things. Consequently, they are really distinguished.

Here first it has to be seen what a first intention is and what a second intention [is]. Second, [I shall speak] to the question.

[Article 1]

[First intention]

On the first point, I say that both first intention and second [intention] can be taken in two senses, namely, broadly and strictly. In the broad sense, every intentional sign existing in the soul, which does not precisely signify intentions or concepts in the soul, or other signs, is called a first intention. And I say this whether ‘sign’ is taken for what can supposit in a proposition and be a part of a proposition (as categoremata are) or whether ‘sign’ is taken for what cannot supposit or be an extreme of a proposition when it is taken significatively (as are syncategoremata).

In this sense, not only mental categoremata that signify things that are not signs, but even mental syncategoremata and verbs and conjunctions and the like are called first intentions. For example: In this sense, not only are the concept of man, which signifies all singular men (who signify nothing) and can

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supposit for them and be a part of a proposition, and the concept of whiteness and the concept of color, etc., called first intentions, but syncategorematic concepts like ‘if’, ‘nevertheless’, ‘not’, ‘while’, and ‘is’, ‘runs’, ‘reads’ and the like are [also] called first intentions. This is because while, taken by themselves, they do not supposit for things, nevertheless when conjoined with other [terms] they make them supposit for things in different ways. For

example, ‘every’ makes ‘man’ supposit and be distributed for all men in the proposition ‘Every man runs’. Yet the sign ‘every’ by itself signifies nothing, because [it] does not [signify] either an external thing or an intention of the soul.

But in the strict sense, precisely a mental name [that is] apt to be an extreme of a proposition and to supposit for a thing that is not a sign is called a first intention. For example, the concept of man, animal, substance, body — and in short, all the mental names that naturally signify things that are not signs.

[Second intention]

Likewise, taken in the broad sense, a concept of the soul is called a second intention if it signifies not only intentions of the soul that are natural signs of things (as first intentions are, taken strictly), but also can signify mental signs signifying by convention — say, mental syncategoremata. In this sense, perhaps, we have only a spoken [term] corresponding to a second intention.¹

But taken strictly, a concept is called a second intention if it precisely signifies first intentions that signify naturally, like ‘genus’, ‘species’, ‘difference’, and others like that. For, just as the concept of man is predicated of all men, by saying ‘This man is a man’, ‘That man is a man’, and so on, so [too] a common concept that is a second intention is predicated of first intentions that supposit for things, by saying ‘Man is a species’, ‘Ass is a species’, ‘Whiteness is a species’, ‘Animal is a genus’, ‘Body is a genus’, ‘Quality is a genus’, in the way that one ‘name’ is predicated of different names by saying ‘Man is a name’, [and] ‘Whiteness is a name’.² And so a second intention naturally signifies first intentions, and can supposit for them in a proposition, just as

¹ I can make no sense the last part of this paragraph. According to what Ockham usually says, mental syncategoremata certainly do *not* signify by convention. And the last sentence of the paragraph seems completely unmotivated. The editor of the Latin text (ed. line 49) notes that for ‘only’ (*non ... nisi*) one manuscript has ‘name’, yielding: “we do not have a spoken name corresponding to a second intention”. This perhaps makes better sense. Two other manuscripts omit the ‘*nisi*’, resulting in pretty much the same meaning.

² The point of the simile is not clear. Perhaps it is simply that both the cases of second intentions and the case of ‘name’ involve propositions in which the subjects are not in personal supposition.

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much as a first intention naturally signifies external things and can supposit for them.

[Article 2]

On the second point, some people say³ that first and second intentions are certain fictive entities that are only objectively in the mind and [are] nowhere subjectively.

To the contrary⁴: When a proposition is verified for things, if two things suffice for its truth, it is superfluous to posit another, third thing. But all propositions like ‘Man is understood’, ‘Man is a subject’ ‘Man is a predicate’, ‘Man is a species’, ‘Animal is a genus’ and the like, on account of which such fictive being is posited, are verified for things. And two things suffice — at least, [two] things truly and really existing suffice — for verifying all [of them].

Therefore, etc. The assumption is clear. For, positing the cognition of man in the intellect, it is impossible for ‘Man is understood’ to be false. Likewise, positing the intention of man in general and the intention of subject in general, and if the mental proposition ‘Man is a subject’ is formed, in which the one intention is predicated of the other, [then] it is necessary for the proposition ‘Man is a subject’ to be true — [even] without any fictum. Therefore, etc. Moreover, such a fictum will get in the way of the cognition of the thing. Therefore, it is not to be posited on account of [that] cognition. The assumption is clear. For [the fictum] is not the cognition or the external cognized whiteness or both together, but rather a certain third [entity] midway between the cognition and the thing. In that case, when I form the mental proposition ‘God is three and one’, I do not understand God in himself but rather the fictum, which seems absurd.

Moreover, by the same reasoning [that leads to this view], God in understanding other [things] would understand such ficta. And so, from eternity, there was an arrangement of as many fictive beings as there can be

³ The following arguments are like those given by Walter Chatton, *Reportatio*, I, Prol., q. 2 (in Jeremiah O’Callaghan, “The Second Question of the Prologue to Walter Chatton’s Commentary on the Sentences on Intuitive and Abstractive Knowledge,” in J. Reginald O’Donnell, ed., *Nine Mediaeval Thinkers*, [“Studies and Texts,” vol. 1; Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1955, pp. 233–269], at p. 241), and d. 3, q. 2, a. 1 (in Gedeon Gál, “Gualteri de Chatton et Guillelmi de Ockham controversia de natura conceptus universalis,” *Franciscan Studies* 27 [1967], pp. 191–212, at pp. 201–202).

⁴ See Ockham himself, *Scriptum*, I, d. 2, q. 8 (271.14–272.2); *Summa logicae*, I, 12.29–31; *Expositio in lib. Perihermenias Aristot.*, I, Prooem. §§ 7 & 10 (359.1–360.29, & 370.1–14). Henry of Harclay, *Quaestiones disputatae*, q. 3 (in Gedeon Gál, “Henricus de Harclay: Quaestio de significato conceptus universalis,” *Franciscan Studies* 31 [1971], pp. 178–234, at pp. 225–227); Peter Auriol, *Commentariorum in I Sententiarum pars prima* (= *Scriptum*), (Rome: Vatican Press, 1596), d. 9, a. 1 (320b–323b).

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different intelligible beings. These [fictive beings] are so necessary that God could not destroy them, which seems false.

Moreover, such a fictum is not to be posited in order to have a subject and a predicate in a universal proposition, because the act of understanding is enough for that. For the fictive being is just as singular, both in being and in representing, as is the act [of understanding].

This is clear from the fact that a fictum can be destroyed, while the other [entity] — the act — remains. For either the fictum depends essentially on the act or it does not. If it does, then when one act stops, the fictum is destroyed. Yet the fictum remains in another act. Consequently, there are two singular ficta, just as [there are] two acts. If it does not depend on this singular act, [then] neither consequently does it depend essentially on any [other] act of the same kind. And so the fictum will remain in objective being without any act, which is impossible.

Moreover, it is not a contradiction for God for make a universal cognition without such a fictum. For the cognition does not depend essentially on such a fictum. But it is a contradiction for an intellection to be posited in an intellect without anything that is understood. Therefore, [such a fictum] it not to be posited on account of a common intellection.

[Ockham's reply]

Therefore, I say that both first intention and second intention are truly acts of understanding. For whatever can be saved by means of the *fictum* can be saved by means of the act, insofar as the act is a likeness of the object, can signify and supposit for external things, can be a subject and a predicate in a proposition, can be a genus, a species, etc., just as a *fictum* [can].

From this it is clear that first and second intention are really distinguished.

For a first intention is an act of understanding that signifies things that are not signs. A second intention is an act of signifying first intentions.

Therefore, they are distinguished.

To the main argument, it is clear from what has been said that both first and second intentions are truly real beings. For they are truly qualities existing subjectively in the intellect.

Quodlibet 5, Question 12

Whether the universal is singular

No. For every universal is predicated of several. A singular is predicated of one only. Therefore, etc.

To the contrary: Everything that is is singular. The universal is. Therefore, it is singular.

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Here I first distinguish [the senses of the term] 'singular'. Second, I will speak to the question.

[Article 1]

On the first point, I say that according to the philosophers 'singular', 'individual', [and] 'suppositum' are convertible names. I say this with respect to logicians, although according to theologians a suppositum is found only among substances, [whereas] the individual and the singular [are found] among accidents [too].

But speaking logically now, 'singular', and 'individual', are taken in three senses: (a) In one sense, that is called a singular which is numerically one thing and not several things. (b) In another sense, a thing outside the soul, which [thing] is one and not several and is not a sign of anything, is called a singular. (c) In a third sense, a sign proper to one [thing] is called a singular. This [last] is [also] called a "discrete term".

This division is plain as far as its first two branches are concerned. The third branch is proved [as follows]: For Porphyry⁶ says that the individual is predicated of one only. This cannot be understood about a thing existing outside the soul — say, about Socrates — since a thing outside the soul is not in predicate position or in subject position, as is shown in another *Quodlibet*.⁷ Consequently, it is understood about some proper sign that it is predicated of one only, not for itself but for the thing.

Moreover, logicians⁸ say that the supposita of a common term are of two kinds: some *per se*, some by accident. For example: The *per se* supposita of the common term 'white' are this white [thing] and that white [thing]. The supposita by accident are Socrates and Plato. This cannot be understood about the Socrates who is outside the soul, because he is the sign of nothing. Because a thing outside the soul cannot be a suppositum of a common term, either *per*

se or by accident, therefore ‘suppositum’ has to be taken for a term proper to one [thing only], which is called a “suppositum” because the common term is predicated of it, not for itself but for its significate.

⁵ This presumably does not refer here to Aristotle, but to “the typical philosopher”. The editor of the Latin text (ed., line 10) gives no reference.

⁶ Porphyry, *Isagoge*, Busse ed., p. 3, line 15. See Paul Vincent Spade, tr., *Five Texts on the Mediaeval Problem of Universals: Porphyry, Boethius, Abelard, Duns Scotus, Ockham*, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), p. 3, para. (13).

⁷ Ockham, *Quodlibet* III, q. 12.19–59.

⁸ See Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, I, 22 (83a1–20); Ockham, *Scriptum*, d. 2, q. 3 (95.4–96.18).

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In that case, there are two kinds of supposita for a common term: One kind *per se* — namely, demonstrative pronouns taken with the common term. For example, the *per se* supposita of the common term ‘white’ are ‘this white’ [and] ‘that white’. The supposita by accident are proper names — say, the name ‘Socrates’ and ‘Plato’.

There is a big difference between these [kinds of] supposita. For it is impossible for one contrary to be truly predicated of a *per se* suppositum of another contrary. For example, ‘This white is black’ is impossible. But it can quite well be predicated of a suppositum by accident, even though not while⁹ it is a suppositum of it. For example, if Socrates is white, still ‘Socrates is black’ is possible. This is because the same [thing] can be a suppositum by accident of two contraries, although not a suppositum *per se*. Therefore, etc.

[Article 2]

On the second point, I say that the universal is a singular and an individual in sense (a), because it is truly a singular quality of the mind, and is not several qualities. But in sense (b) it is not a singular, because in no way is any thing whatever outside the soul a universal. Likewise, the universal is not a singular in sense (c), because the universal is a natural or voluntary sign [that is] common to several and not only to one.

[The reply] to the main argument is clear from [these] statements.

Quodlibet 5, Question 13

Whether every universal is a quality of the mind

No. For the substance that is a most general genus is not a quality of the mind. Therefore, not every universal is a quality of the mind. The assumption is clear, because it is predicated univocally and *in quid* of a substance. Therefore, it is not a quality.

To the contrary: The universal is only in the soul. And not objectively, as was shown earlier.¹⁰ Therefore, subjectively. Therefore, it is a quality of the mind.

To this question, I say: Yes. The reason for this is that, as will be clear,¹¹ the universal is not anything outside the soul. And it is certain that it is

⁹ not while: Reading ‘*non dum*’ for the edition’s ‘*nondum*’ (ed. lines 45–46).

¹⁰ Above, *Quodlibet* IV, q. 35.

¹¹ The point is discussed in many places in *Quodlibets* V–VII. See also *Quodlibet* V, q. 12, above; *Summa logicae*, I, 15; *Scriptum*, d. 2, qq. 4–8.

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not nothing. Therefore, it is something in the soul. Not just objectively, as was

proved earlier.¹² Therefore, subjectively. Consequently, it is a quality of the mind.

[Objection 1]¹³

But to the contrary: Given this, then all categories would be accidents.

Consequently, some accident would be superior to substance.

[Objection 2]

Moreover, the same [thing] is not predicated of diverse categories.

Consequently, quality is not common to all the categories.

[Objection 3]

Moreover, it follows that the same [thing] is superior to itself. For all universals are in the genus of quality, according to this opinion, as [are] species and individuals. Consequently, the category of quality is common to all universals. Consequently, the category of quality is common to itself. And so the same [thing] is superior to itself.

[Objection 4]

Moreover, given this, one has to grant that the same [thing] signifies itself and supposits for itself. For in the proposition ‘Every universal is a being’, ‘being’ supposits personally for all universals. Consequently, it supposits for the universal that is ‘being’. So ‘being’ supposits for itself. Likewise, [taken] as it supposits personally, it supposits only for its significates and it supposits for itself. For otherwise the universal proposition ‘Every universal is a being’ would be false, because it would have a false singular. Therefore, the same [thing] signifies itself.

[Objection 5]

Moreover, it follows that the same [thing] is superior and inferior with respect to the same [thing]. For the universal ‘being’ is superior to the categories. And it is inferior, because it is one individual in the genus of quality. Therefore, etc.

¹² *Quodlibet IV*, q. 35.

¹³ For these objections, except for the fourth, see Ockham’s *Summa logicae*, I, 17 lines 25–32, 110–112, & 136.

[To Objection 1]

To the first of these, I grant¹⁴ that all universals are accidents. Yet not all [of them] are signs of accidents. Rather some universals are signs of substances only. And those accidents constitute the category of substance, [while] the other accidents constitute the other categories. I grant further that some accident that is only a sign of substances is *per se* superior to any substance. That is no more of a problem than saying that some utterance is a name of many substances, or signifies many substances.

[To Objection 2]

To the other [objection], I say¹⁵ that the same [thing] is not predicated of diverse categories when the categories stand personally and significatively. But when they supposit materially or simply, it is not incongruous for the same [thing] to be predicated of diverse categories. Hence, if in the proposition ‘Substance is a quality’ the subject supposits materially or simply, [the proposition] is true. Likewise ‘Quantity is a quality’. But if [the subjects]

supposit materially, then [the propositions] are not true. Hence, just as the two propositions ‘Substance is an utterance’ [and] ‘Quantity is an utterance’ are true if the subjects supposit materially and simply and not significantly, so it is in the present case [too].

[To Objection 3]

To the other [objection], I say¹⁶ that the same [thing] is not superior and inferior to itself. For in order for something to be superior to another, a distinction between them is required, [and it is also required] that the superior signify more than the inferior [does]. Therefore, I say that not all universals are *per se* inferior to the common [term] ‘quality’, even though all universals are qualities. For the universal ‘quality’ is a quality. Yet it is not inferior to ‘quality’ — rather it *is* that.

Suppose you say¹⁷: It follows at least that spiritual quality of the mind is in more than, and superior to, any category. For it is predicated of all categories, and no category is predicated of all categories. Therefore, etc.

¹⁴ See Ockham, *Summa logicae*, I, 17.93–103.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, lines 111–120.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* lines 104–109.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* lines 121–124.

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I reply¹⁸: A spiritual quality of the mind is not predicated of all categories taken significantly and personally, but only taken for signs. Therefore, it does not follow that quality is in more than, or superior to, any category. For superiority and inferiority between [things] is taken from the fact that the one taken significantly is predicated of more than the other taken significantly [is]. And this is not so for every spiritual quality that is universal. Nevertheless, some [such quality], like the concept of being, is predicated of more than any category [is].

[To Objection 4]

To the other [objection], I say¹⁹ that the conclusion is to be granted, that the same [thing] signifies itself, that the same [thing] supposits for itself, that the same [thing] is predicated univocally of itself. For example, in the proposition ‘Every utterance is a being’, the subject supposits for every utterance, and so it supposits for the utterance ‘utterance’, and it signifies it and is predicated univocally of it.

[To Objection 5]

To the other [objection], I say²⁰ that there is the same difficulty here as with the name ‘word’ and the name ‘name’. For the name ‘word’ is one of the contents under ‘name’, because the name ‘word’ is a name, and not every name is the name ‘word’. Nevertheless, the name ‘word’ is in a certain way superior to all names, and consequently to the name ‘name’. For the name ‘name’ is a word. But not every word is a name. And so the same [thing], with respect to the same [thing], is [both] inferior and superior.

Therefore, I say for both cases that the argument would be conclusive if in all the propositions from which the conclusion is predicated,²¹ the terms supposited uniformly. But that is not so in the case at hand. For ‘being’, when it is predicated of the categories, supposits personally, not simply or materially. But

[taken] as it is an individual [in the category of] quality, it supposits materially and simply.

But we are taking both 'being' and 'quality' significatively. In that case, 'being' is simply superior, because it signifies more. And in that sense it is not inferior to quality and [is] not an individual in [that category]. Nevertheless, if

18 *Ibid.* lines 125–13; also *ibid.*, 18.85–87.

19 *Ibid.*, 38.28–32.

20 *Ibid.*, 17.130–143.

21 predicated: Thus in ed. line 104.

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